Natural Resources Conservation Service

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

UNDERGROUND OUTLET

CODE 620

(ft)

DEFINITION

A conduit or system of conduits installed beneath the surface of the ground to convey surface water to a suitable outlet.

PURPOSE

This practice is used to accomplish the following purpose:

- To carry water to a suitable outlet from terraces, water and sediment control basins, diversions, waterways, surface drains, other similar practices or flow concentrations without causing damage by erosion or flooding

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies where:

- Disposal of surface water is necessary.
- An outlet is needed for a terrace, diversion, water and sediment control basin or similar practice and a surface outlet is impractical because of stability problems, topography, climatic conditions, land use or equipment traffic.
- The site is suitable for an underground outlet.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Fire resistant materials shall be used for underground outlet components if fire is an expected hazard. All plastics must be UV resistant or protected from exposure to sunlight.

Components of underground outlets, including inlet collection boxes and conduit junction boxes, shall be designed with sufficient size to permit maintenance and cleaning operations.

Perforated components of underground outlets shall be designed to prevent soil particle movement into the underground outlet. Refer to Conservation Practice Standard 606, Subsurface Drain, for criteria for design of filters.

Capacity

The design capacity of the underground outlet will be based on the requirements of the structure or practice it serves. The underground outlet can be designed to function as the only outlet for a structure or in conjunction with other types of outlets. The capacity of the underground outlet shall be adequate for the intended purpose without causing inundation damage to crops, vegetation, or works of improvement.

Underground outlets shall be continuous conduits, tubing, or tile. Vents should be considered at points of sharp grade increases to prevent surges and vacuum conditions.

Simplified Flood routing techniques may be used to determine the relationship between flooding duration, underground release rate, and basin storage volume. Table M-1, found in the MN Engineering Field Handbook, Chapter 8 (EFH8), “Terraces”, Notice 3, page 8-72.1 may be used for this purpose.

Underground outlets may be designed for either pressure or gravity flow. If designed as a pressure system, all pipes and joints must be adequate to withstand the design pressure, including surge pressure and vacuum conditions.

To fully utilize conduit capacity, design the inlet to provide maximum flow in the conduit. To prevent pressure flow or overloading of the conduit a flow restricting device such as an orifice or weir can be used to limit flow into the conduit.

An underground outlet shall not be designed to discharge into a structure unless the structure is designed to accommodate the additional inflow.

Pressure-relief wells may be used to allow excess flow to escape the conduit and flow over the ground surface. Use pressure relief wells only where there is a stable outlet for the flow from the relief well. Pressure relief wells should be covered with a grate or other appropriate covering to prevent the entry of small animals and debris.

Inlet
An inlet can be a collection box, blind inlet (gravel), perforated riser, perforated conduit, or other appropriate device.

Open inlets must have a trash guard. Design the inlet to permit trash or debris entering the inlet to pass through the flow restricting device and conduit without plugging.

Perforated riser inlets shall be durable, structurally sound, and resistant to damage by rodents or other animals. Perforations must be smooth, free of burrs, and have adequate capacity to prevent the riser from restricting flow in the underground outlet.

Blind inlets may be used where the installation of an open or above ground structure is impractical. Design the blind inlet with a graded granular filter around the conduit. Design the filter based on the particle size of the surrounding soil and the desired flow rate. Refer to EFH14 for the design of blind inlets.

Inlets shall be offset from the main conduit a minimum of 8 ft., except for the top inlet in the system. At least 8 ft. of sealed conduit shall be installed downstream from any vertical inlet.

Perforated risers or blind inlets shall be used where crop residues or other trash could plug ground level inlets. The minimum diameter of perforated risers shall be 5 inches. To compensate for possible plugging, slots or holes in risers shall be adequate to provide at least twice the design flow with the water depth in the basin at the design depth. Minnesota supplement to the MN EFH8, page 8-102.2 provides a chart of maximum tile intake capacities.

Conduit
The minimum allowable diameter of conduits is 4 inches. Conduit joints shall be hydraulically smooth and consistent with the manufacturer’s recommendation for the conduit material and installation.

Design the underground outlet to ensure that maximum allowable loads on the conduit are not exceeded for the type and size of conduit. Depth of cover requirements shall be assessed to prevent damage to the underground outlet from tillage operations and frost action.

Thrust blocking or anchoring shall be provided where needed to prevent undesired movement of the conduit. Placement and bedding requirements for the conduit are required to ensure integrity of the installation.

The flow velocity in the conduit must not exceed the maximum allowable design velocity for the conduit materials and installation condition. Gravity flow systems must maintain a positive grade throughout the conduit length towards the outlet.

Refer to Conservation Practice 606, Subsurface Drain, for criteria for design loading, thrust blocking, placement and bedding requirements, and minimum and maximum design velocity in the conduit.

Materials
Plastic, concrete, aluminum, and steel pipe shall meet the requirements specified in the applicable ASTM standard. All materials specified in Conservation Practice Standard 606, Subsurface Drain, may be used for underground outlets. Materials must meet applicable site specific design requirements for leakage, external loading, and internal pressure including vacuum conditions.

Underground outlet conduits can be perforated or nonperforated, depending on the design requirements. Use a filter fabric wrap (sock) or appropriately designed granular filter if migration of soil particles into the conduit is anticipated. Design the filter based on the particle size of the surrounding soil to prevent rapid clogging of the filter. Refer to standard Subsurface Drainage (606), for criteria for the design of filter media. Protect all exposed plastic materials from degradation due to exposure to sunlight.

Outlet
The outlet must be stable and protected against erosion and undermining for the range of design flow conditions.

The outlet must consist of a continuous section of pipe, 10 feet or longer, without open joints or perforations, and with stiffness necessary to withstand expected loads, including those caused by ice.

Do not design outlets to be placed in areas of active erosion.

A shorter section of closed conduit may be used if a headwall is used at the outlet of the conduit.

All outlets shall have animal guards to prevent the entry of rodents or other animals. Design animal guards to allow passage of debris while blocking the entry of animals large enough to restrict the flow in the conduit.

A vertical outlet may be used to discharge water to the ground surface where topography does not allow adequate conduit cover using a horizontal outlet, or where it is practical to discharge over a vegetated filter strip.

The vertical outlet (relief well) shall be adequately perforated and placed in an envelope of coarsely graded aggregate to allow the system to drain during periods when not in use.

Stabilization
Reshape and regrade all disturbed areas so that they blend with the surrounding land features and conditions. For areas that will not be farmed, refer to Conservation Practice Standard 342, Critical Area Planting, for establishment of vegetation criteria. Permanent vegetation shall be established on all disturbed areas as soon as possible after construction.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider recessing outlets into slopes where potential exists for ice damage.

Pressure relief wells and vertical outlets, if not properly covered, can present a safety hazard for people or animals and may be damaged by field equipment. Pressure relief wells and vertical outlet locations should be identified with a high visibility marker.

The rapid removal of water through an underground outlet will affect the water budget where it is installed. It can reduce infiltration. It can increase or decrease peak flows to receiving waters and reduce long term flows into the same waters.

Consideration should be given to the effects that the underground outlet may have on water quantity downstream. Consider these long term environmental, social, and economic effects when making design decisions for the underground outlet and the structure or practice it serves. Refer to Conservation Practice Standard 554, Drainage Water Management, for criteria on flow restriction from natural basins.

If perforated pipe is used for the subsurface conduit, locate the practice so that it has a negligible impact on the hydrology of wetlands. Where wetlands may be affected, the cooperator will be advised and current NRCS wetland policy will apply.

To prevent sediment from collecting in the conduit, underground outlets should be designed with a minimum velocity of 1.4 ft/sec.

Where perforated risers are used, often the risers are perforated below the surface of the ground to facilitate drainage. In this situation, if soil entry into the riser perforations is a problem, use an appropriately designed gravel or geotextile filter around the buried portion of the riser.

Seasonal water sources can be beneficial for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife. Consider the use of a water control structure, on the inlet of an underground outlet, during non-cropping periods to provide water for wildlife. Refer to Conservation Practice Standard 646, Shallow Water Development and Management, for information on managing seasonal water sources for wildlife.

Underground outlets can provide a direct conduit to receiving waters for contaminated runoff from crop land. Underground outlets and the accompanying structure or practice should be installed as part of a conservation system that addresses issues such as nutrient and pest management, residue management and filter areas.

The construction of an underground outlet in a riparian corridor can have an adverse effect on the visual resources of the corridor. Consider the visual quality of the riparian area when designing the underground outlet.

The construction of an underground outlet can disturb large areas and potentially affect cultural resources. Be sure to follow state cultural resource protection policies before construction begins.

If an installation in a crop field is too shallow, tillage equipment can damage an underground outlet. Consider the type and depth of tillage that will likely occur when designing the depth of an underground outlet. A minimum of 2 ft. of cover is recommended over all conduits.

Consider potential effects of soil physical and soil chemical properties influence on area where a conduit or system of conduits are installed to convey surface water. Refer to soil survey data as a preliminary planning tool for assessment of areas. Consult the Web Soil Survey to obtain soil properties and qualities information.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare plans and specifications for underground outlets that describe the requirements for applying this practice according to this standard. The plans and specifications for an underground outlet may be incorporated into the plans and specifications for the structure or practice it serves. As a minimum the plans and specifications shall include:

- A plan view of the layout of the underground outlet.
- Typical cross sections and bedding requirements for the underground outlet.
- Profile of the underground outlet.
- Details of the inlet and outlet.
- Seeding requirements if needed.
- Construction specifications that describe in writing the site specific installation requirements of the underground outlet.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Prepare an operation and maintenance plan for the operator. The minimum requirements to be addressed in a written operation and maintenance plan are:

- Periodic inspections, especially immediately following significant runoff events, to keep inlets, trash guards, and collection boxes and structures clean and free of materials that can reduce flow.
- Prompt repair or replacement of damaged components.
- Repair or replacement of inlets damaged by farm equipment.
- Repair of leaks and broken or crushed lines to insure proper functioning of the conduit.
- Periodic Inspection of the outlet and animal guards to ensure proper functioning.
- Repair of eroded areas at the pipe outlet.
- Maintenance of adequate backfill over the conduit.
- To maintain the permeability of surface materials on blind inlets, periodic scouring or removal and replacement of the surface soil layer may be necessary.

REFERENCES

USDA, NRCS. National Engineering Handbook, Part 650 Engineering Field Handbook, Chapters 6, 8 & 14.

Web Soil Survey: http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/